

Adding Calories and Protein to Your Child's Diet

Eating more calories and protein can help your child meet their needs for growth.

Offer higher calorie and protein foods

The amount your child eats may depend on how:

- fast they are growing,
- active they are, or
- they are feeling.

Food textures

Match the texture of foods to your child's age and feeding skills.

You can use the food and fluids lists for ideas that may work with your child.

Prevent choking in small children

Children younger than age 4 can easily choke on certain foods.

To prevent choking, use care when preparing and offering certain foods. These foods include:

- Candy, hard or sticky
- Chewing gum
- Dried fruit, such as raisins or apricots
- Fruit chunks like apple
- Grapes, whole
- Lumps of peanut butter
- Meat or cheese chunks
- Nuts
- Popcorn
- Raw vegetables
- Seeds, like sunflower or watermelon
- Wieners or sausages, such as 'hot dogs'

Avoid giving round, firm foods to children younger than 4 years old. Chop these foods well to lower the risk.



Learn more:

Check out [Myhealth.alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca)

- Search: [Choking Prevention in Small Children](#)

Pureed Foods

If your child eats pureed-texture foods, these tips may help you add extra calories and protein to these foods.

These tips can also be used if your child eats other textures as well.

- Mash potatoes, sweet potatoes, squash, or turnips with 3.25% (homogenized) milk or cream and oil or butter.
- When pureeing vegetables and fruits, add 1 tsp (5 mL) canola or vegetable oil to ½ cup (125 mL) puree.
- Use avocado in smoothies.
- Add full fat gravy or sauce, such as curry or sweet and sour sauce to food.
- Add nut or seed butter to hot cereals, smoothies, sauces, or soups.
- Offer 3.25% milk or fortified soy beverages as a drink at meals.
- Use cream in place of milk in recipes.
- Add skim or whole milk powder to pureed foods.
- Add oil, butter, or soft margarine to pureed meats, vegetables, and grains.



Learn how to make smoothies with more calories and protein for your child. Check out ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts and search "smoothies".



Higher calorie and protein food list

Use the following list to add extra calories and protein to foods your child enjoys. Try to offer higher calorie and protein foods at each meal and snack.

Protein foods	
<p>Animal-based</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cured meats, such as bacon, prosciutto, salami • Eggs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Whole eggs or liquid whole eggs ◦ Egg substitutes such as Eggbeaters® ◦ Egg whites • Fish, all types (canned, fresh, or frozen) • Meat, such as beef, bison, buffalo, elk, lamb, moose, pork, rabbit, and venison • Poultry, such as chicken, duck, partridge, and turkey • Seafood and shellfish, such as clams, crab, lobster, mussels, and shrimp • Wieners, sausages, and deli meats <p>Milk and dairy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheese <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Brick cheese, full fat, such as cheddar, Colby, and Swiss ◦ Cottage or ricotta cheese 2% M.F. or higher ◦ Cream cheese, full fat ◦ Paneer ◦ Soft cheese, full fat, such as mozzarella, brie. • Cream, all types • Custard, pudding • Ice cream, frozen yogurt (full fat versions) • Milk, 3.25% • Milk powder (skim and whole) • Yogurt, Balkan, Greek, or Icelandic-style yogurt, higher than 2% M.F. • Yogurt, 2–11% M.F. • Sour cream, 14% M.F. 	<p>Plant-based</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All dried, canned, or fresh legumes and pulses (beans, peas, lentils) • Edamame (green soybeans) • Fortified soy beverage • Hummus • Nut butters, such as almond, peanut, and cashew • Nut butter alternatives such as soy nut or pea, such as Wowbutter® or NoNuts® Golden Peabutter • Nutritional yeast • Nuts, such as almonds, Brazil nuts, hazelnuts, macadamia, peanuts, pecans, pistachios, and walnuts • Plant-based yogurt such as soy • Seed butters, such as pumpkin, sesame, or tahini • Seeds, such as chia, flax, hemp hearts, pumpkin, sunflower, sesame • Seitan • Soy cheese • Tofu (soft, hard), tempeh, meat substitutes • Trail mix (nuts, seeds, and dried fruits like apricots, cranberries, or raisins)
Condiments, fats, and oils	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avocado • Butter, ghee, and soft margarine (regular, non-hydrogenated) • Coconut, coconut milk (regular fat) • Creamy sauces, full fat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravy, full fat • Mayonnaise and salad dressings (regular) • Oils, such as canola, flax, olive, vegetable • Vegan margarine, non-hydrogenated

M.F. = milk fat

Tips to add more calories and protein at meals and snacks

See the tips below for how to include food and drinks from the “Higher calorie and protein food list”.

Protein foods

- Add milk powder to cream soups, potatoes, hot cereals, smoothies, puddings, and casseroles.
- Serve eggs fried in oil, soft margarine, or butter, or scramble eggs with cheese.
- Add cooked peas, beans, and lentils into dips, sauces, soups, or casseroles.

Vegetables and fruits

- Add sour cream, cream cheese, or grated cheese to cooked vegetables.
- Offer fruit with yogurt, cottage cheese, or pudding.
- Offer raw vegetables with hummus, bean, or yogurt dip.
- Use avocado as a spread on sandwiches or crackers, or mash and use as a dip.



Grain foods

- Serve pancakes, waffles, or French toast made with extra eggs, oil, or skim or whole milk powder. Serve with syrup, fruit, yogurt, or whipped cream.
- Make hot or cold cereals with 3.25% milk or cream. Top with nut butter, fruit, and cream.
- Serve rice or congee with bean curd, egg, or tofu.
- Add wheat germ to baked goods, sprinkle on yogurt, or use in place of breadcrumbs.
- Spread cream cheese, avocado, or butter on bread, muffins, and loaves.
- Layer butter or soft margarine (or vegan margarine) under nut or seed butter on toast or bread.

Mixed dishes

- Offer chicken, beef, tuna, ham, or egg casseroles and sandwiches.
- Spread nut or seed butter on bread, crackers, muffins, bananas, apple slices, or celery sticks.
- Add vegetable oil, soft margarine, or butter to cooked pasta, potatoes, rice, and vegetables.
- Mix mayonnaise or avocado with boiled eggs, chicken, or canned fish to make a sandwich filling.
- Use salad dressing, sour cream, or mayonnaise as a dip for vegetables, fruit, pita bread, or crackers.

Note for food allergies or sensitivities

You can swap food or drinks with similar higher calorie and protein foods that are safe for your child. For example:

- Use seed or soy butter in place of peanut butter.
- Swap cow’s milk cheese with soy cheese.
- Try vegan margarine or oil in place of butter or soft margarine.
- Use fortified soy beverage in place of milk as a drink or in recipes.



Other plant-based beverages, like those made from almond or coconut are often much lower in calories and protein.

- Substitute eggs in baking for egg allergies. Swap 1 whole egg with flaxseed or chia seed recipe:



1 whole egg = 1 recipe below

Flaxseed recipe:

Combine: 1 Tbsp (15 mL) ground flaxseed
2 ½ Tbsp (37 mL) water

Chia seeds recipe:

Combine: 2 Tbsp (30 mL) whole chia seeds
2 ½ Tbsp (37 mL) water

Let the mixture rest for 5 minutes to thicken. When thickened, add to baking as directed in place of the egg.

If you have questions about the best choice for your child, ask your dietitian or healthcare team.

Meal and snack tips

Serve your child the same food as everyone else, but with extra calories and protein added.

- Add extra fat, sauces, and dips to your child's food before you bring it to the table.
- Try for a set mealtime routine with 3 meals and 2–3 snacks each day.
- Offer only water between planned meals and snacks. This allows your child's appetite to build between eating times.
- When a child drinks too many fluids, it may make them less hungry for meals and snacks.
 - Offer no more than 2–3 cups (500–750 mL) of milk each day. Offer milk at meal or snack times.
 - Limit juice to ½ cup (125 mL) each day.
- When able, choose foods with regular fat and calories. Limit foods and drinks labelled “light”, “low fat”, “fat-free”, “low calorie”, or “sugar-free”.



Learn about the feeding relationship and family mealtimes. Check out ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts, and use the Topic filter, “Feeding Your Child”.



For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](https://ahs.ca/811) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit ahs.ca/Nutrition.
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta (ab.211.ca/) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services.